

Week Ending Friday, January 12, 2001

**Remarks on Action To Preserve
America's Forests**

January 5, 2001

Thank you very much. You guys are all cheating. You're just trying to warm up. I know what's going on. [*Laughter*] I was told by an elderly conservationist from my home State of Arkansas that I had better do a good job with America's natural resources when I became President, on pain of feeling the fire of Hades. I did not realize that our reward is that we would be freezing to death here. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank my good friend Senator Gaylord Nelson for a lifetime of leadership in conservation. And I am profoundly grateful to Secretary Glickman and to Chief Dombeck, a career public servant, who said it all when he began by saying, "This is not a political issue for those of us who believe in it."

I thank Jim Lyons and the others at the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service. I want to thank our EPA Administrator, Carol Browner, who's here with us today. Just a few days ago, she announced her new rule to cut harmful emissions caused by the burning of diesel fuel. It will dramatically improve the quality of air in America, and we thank her for that.

I would like to also acknowledge the substantial contributions to this effort, particularly in fading the heat. And believe it or not, even today there was some heat involved in this. I want to thank John Podesta and George Frampton and the others at the White House for their strong support for the course we have followed.

And I'd like to thank Dr. Tom Elias for hosting us again and for showing me my bonsai tree when I came up. [*Laughter*] We came here 2 years ago to launch the lands legacy initiative, and I knew this was the place to plant the seeds of success. And I thank him—that is also another major

achievement of this Congress this year, the largest increase in funding for land conservation in the history of the Republic, and I thank all those who were involved in that.

Finally, I would like to thank Congressman Mark Udall for being here with his bride, Maggie. Thank you very much for being here. As you know, he comes from a family with fairly substantial environmental credentials, and he came here, and the first thing he said was that we had done the right thing today. And we will need his voice in Congress this year, and we thank him for being here.

For the first time ever, with the lands legacy initiative, we established a dedicated continuous fund for protecting and restoring green and open spaces across America. Today we come to build on that record.

In one way or another, all of us have come here, and I now have come to know many of you in this audience. And I know we come from different backgrounds and have traveled different paths through life, but somehow or another, we have in common our view that nature is a priceless but fragile gift, an important part of the fabric of our lives, and a major part of our responsibility to our children and our children's children.

I grew up in a State where more than half the land is covered by forest. I grew up in a town surrounded by a national park. Most of the people who enjoy our public lands are like the people I grew up with—hard-working families who very often could afford no other kind of vacation and can afford nature's bounty because our forebears made sure that it belongs to them, and it belongs to us all.

I am grateful that we can stand here today because of the work done by Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Muir. I am grateful for all those who have walked in their footsteps for a hundred years. I am grateful that for the last 8 years I had a Vice President who spoke out strongly for these values and these policies and helped us to

do what we have done to be good stewards of the land.

We have saved and restored some of our most glorious natural wonders, from Florida's Everglades to Hawaii's coral reefs, from the redwoods of California to the red rock canyons of Utah. We have helped hundreds of communities, under the Vice President's leadership, to protect parks and farms and other green spaces. We've built new partnerships with landowners to restore and preserve the natural values of our private land.

We've modernized the management of our national forests to strengthen protections for water quality, wildlife, and recreation, while ensuring a steady and sustainable supply of timber. We have greatly expanded our cooperation with other nations to protect endangered species and threatened areas, like tropical forests.

In a larger sense, I hope and believe we have helped to put to rest the old debate between economic growth and environmental protection. We have the strongest economy in a generation and the cleanest environment in a generation. And I might say, parenthetically, that as we come to grips—as inevitably we must—with the challenge of climate change, and even though it is hard to believe on this day global warming is real—[laughter]—those of you who are here today will have to be in the vanguard reminding people that we can break the iron chain between more greenhouse gas emissions and economic growth. It is not necessary any longer, but we have to be smarter about what we're doing.

Today we take, as Secretary Glickman said, a truly historic lead on the path of environmental progress. Throughout our national forest system there are millions of acres of land that do not have and, in most cases, have never had roads cut through them. These areas represent some of the last, best unprotected wild lands anywhere in America.

These uniquely American landscapes are sanctuaries to hike and hunt and ski and fish. They're a source of clean water for millions of our fellow citizens. They are havens for wildlife and home to about one quarter of all threatened or endangered species in our Nation.

On a beautiful fall afternoon more than a year ago now, Secretary Glickman and many of you joined me at Virginia's Washington and Jefferson National Forest to launch a process to safeguard these lands. As Secretary Glickman just described, we reached out to the American people to help us develop the plan. More than a million and a half responded.

I'm told that more Americans were involved in shaping this policy than any land preservation initiative in the history of the Republic. Thanks to their extraordinary support, the process is now complete.

Sometimes, progress comes by expanding frontiers, but sometimes, it's measured by preserving frontiers for our children. Today we preserve the final frontiers of America's national forests for our children.

I am proud to announce that we will protect nearly 60 million acres of pristine forest land for future generations. That is an area greater in size than all our national parks combined. From the Appalachian Mountains to the Sierra Nevada, forest land in 39 States will be preserved in all its splendor, off limits to roadbuilding and logging that would destroy its timeless beauty.

This will include protection for the last great temperate rain forest in America, Alaska's Tongass National Forest. This initiative will provide strong, long-term protection for the Tongass, while honoring our commitment to address the economic concerns of local communities. We will work with them to ensure a smooth transition and to build a sound, sustainable economic base for the future.

Indeed, our entire approach to managing our national forests has been based on striking the right balance. For example, under this rule, the Forest Service still will be able to build a road or fight a fire or thin an area in an environmentally sensitive way, if it is essential to reducing the risk of future fires. And even as we strengthen protections, the majority of our forests will continue to be responsibly managed for timber production and other activities.

Bear in mind, as has already been said, only about 4 or 5 percent of our country's timber comes from our national forests. And less than 5 percent of that is now being cut

in roadless areas. Surely we can adjust the Federal program to replace 5 percent of 5 percent. But we can never replace what we might destroy if we don't protect those 58 million acres.

Ultimately, this is about preserving the land which the American people own for the American people that are not around yet, about safeguarding our magnificent open spaces, because not everyone can travel to the great palaces of the world, but everyone can enjoy the majesty of our great forests. Today we free the lands so that they will remain unspoiled by bulldozers, undisturbed by chainsaws, and untouched for our children. Preserving roadless areas puts America on the right road for the future, the responsible path of sustainable development.

The great conservationist Aldo Leopold, who pioneered the protection of wild forest roadless areas, said, "When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." If there is one thing that should always unite us as a community, across the generations, across parties, across time, it is love for the land. We keep faith with that tradition today, and we must keep faith with it in all the tomorrows to come.

This is a great day for America. I thank all of you who made it happen. It is your achievement, but it is a gift that you give to all future generations, to walk in the woods, fish in the streams, breathe the air. The beauty of our wild lands will now be there for our children, and all our children, for all time to come. And I hope you will always be very proud that you were a part of it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:25 p.m. in the courtyard at the U.S. National Arboretum. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Gaylord Nelson, founder, Earth Day, and Thomas S. Elias, Director, U.S. National Arboretum. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at an Armed Forces Tribute to the President in Arlington, Virginia

January 5, 2001

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. First, I would like to thank Secretary Cohen for his kind and generous remarks and even more for his outstanding leadership of the Department of Defense.

I must say, Bill, when I asked you to become Secretary of Defense, in an attempt to strengthen the bipartisan or, indeed, non-partisan support for the Defense Department among the American people and the Congress, I didn't know that I was the first President in history to ask an elected official of the opposite party to hold that job. Shoot, I might not have done it if I had known that. *[Laughter]*

It's one of those occasions where ignorance was wisdom, because you brought to the challenge a sharp mind, a fierce integrity, a loving heart for the men and women in uniform. Your wife, Janet, touched people who serve in our military forces all around the world in a unique and special way. And I'm glad that you believe this is the most important service of your 31-year career. But on this, sir, you gave as good as you got, and we thank you.

And General Shelton, I want to thank you. I will never forget the day when General Shelton, in his previous command post, stepped out of the boat, into the water, onto the beach in Haiti in his boots and his beret. I think he could have gone alone and prevailed just as well as he did with the help of the others who went with him.

I'll never forget the time I came to your office, sir, in your previous job, and I looked on the wall and there was a picture of Stonewall Jackson. And I said to myself, "I wonder if Stonewall Jackson would be a Democrat or a Republican if he were alive today." I've often commented to General Shelton that we have made—he, Secretary Cohen, and I—